News release

Third Earth Observation Summit - Brussels

15 February 2005

A topic for discussion at the third Earth Observation Summit of the European Commission, being held on 16 February 2005 in Brussels, will be the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS). At the event, the Met Office along with colleagues from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the British National Space Centre (BNSC) and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) are supporting the UK in its leading role in this important discussion.

GEOSS is the tool that aims to bring about worldwide benefits to humankind through:

- the improved monitoring of the state of the Earth
- increased understanding of dynamic Earth processes
- enhanced prediction of the Earth system
- further implementation of international environmental treaty obligations

GEOSS will help countries to identify and address global environmental and economic challenges – such as climate change and natural disasters – by creating a single, comprehensive and sustained Earth observation system. It is hoped that the international organisations and governments attending the Summit will endorse its development.

The inaugural Earth Observation Summit (EOSI, Washington, July 2003) which initiated the ad-hoc Group on Earth Observations (GEO), arose from the desire to co-ordinate earth observational activities discussed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, September 2002) and the G8 Evian meeting (June 2003).

GEOSS will develop a 10-year implementation plan to build this observational system of systems. This 10-year plan will result in the commitment of nations to make more complete long-term collection of high-priority Earth observations; filling of the gaps in observation capabilities; capacity-building in both developing and developed countries and greater interoperability and connectivity among individual component observing systems. The collective GEOSS will improve the exchange and sharing of data and information to commonly agreed standards and improvements in data assimilation, Earth system modelling, predictions, analysis and monitoring.

The vision of GEOSS is to expand worldwide capacity and means to achieve sustainable development, and is a step towards addressing the challenges articulated by the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. Building on efforts from existing international programmes, GEOSS will yield advances initially in nine societal benefit areas: disasters, health, energy, climate, water, weather, ecosystems, agriculture and biodiversity.

Notes

- Currently, 53 countries, the European Commission and 33 international organisations participate in the GEO process.
- The UK has been an active member from the outset, and our involvement in facilitating the appropriate co-ordination mechanisms and GEO infrastructure is led by Defra with support from the Met Office, BNSC and NERC.
- Through its Chair of the G8 group in 2005, and its presidency of the EU in the second-half of 2005, the UK will be raising the awareness of collaboration within the international community.
- Key components to international collaboration will be providing for the development needs of the international community, with particular focus on Africa, and combating climate change and its impact on all areas of society and the environment.
- Coincident with this summit on the 16 February will be the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. Climate change is one of the key bases for GEO and GEOSS relating to gaining a better understanding of climate change trends and their impact.

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